

A Brief Statement of Concern to Our Legislature

Wyncroft, LLC
716-B East Front Street
Buchanan, MI 49107

5/24/05

Wyncroft, LLC is a small family owned and operated estate winery in Buchanan, Michigan. Our wines fetch the highest prices of any Michigan winery—our lowest price being our dry Riesling at \$240.00 per case, and our highest being our “Shou” (pronounced “show”) a Bordeaux-style blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc at \$540.00 per case. Even at these prices we sell out quickly. We farm our own grapes and produce around 600 cases of “Ultra-premium wine each year which we sell directly to a “Private Customer Mailing List” by the case only. We do not have a tasting room. We also sell some to top restaurants in key markets such as Detroit and Grand Rapids. *(Please read attached article for a taste of the press we receive!)*

We self distribute our wines, being too small to need or want the services of a wine distributor. We are typical of the kind of small winery that pioneers an emerging fine wine region such as SW Michigan. We are also typical of the kind of small premium producer which elevates the reputation of most fine wine regions in the world.

IF THE LEGISLATURE DECIDES TO DISALLOW DIRECT SHIPMENTS TO MY CUSTOMERS WITHIN THE STATE, WE WILL BE PUT OUT OF BUSINESS!

The reasons are quite simple. With such a small production, limited by what we can produce from our small vineyard, we must produce extremely high quality wines that fetch a premium price to make ends meet. It is all we can do to keep up with farming, winemaking, and marketing our wines to just break even financially. As we plant more vineyards, we will become profitable. For now, we must live within the restraints of our size. If you rule in favor of the large special interest monopolies of the wine distributors and disallow direct shipping, I will be forced to use a wholesale wine distributor. This is what they want—to deprive me of my right to self-distribute. They will mark up my wines an additional 30% which will make them too expensive and we will lose our customer base which we have laboriously developed bit by bit over the past two years.

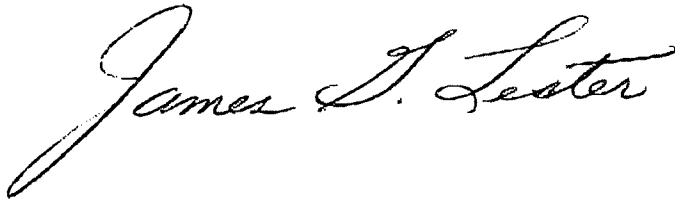
Large wineries need wine distributors, as their volume demands it. The businesses that will be threatened most by disallowing direct shipment are the small emerging premium producers such as Wyncroft. *The spirit of the Supreme court decision was anti-discriminatory. It makes no sense whatsoever for the Michigan Legislature to remedy*

this in-state/out-state discrimination by issuing another kind of discrimination against the small wineries such as Wyncroft who must self-distribute to survive!!

I urge the Legislature to act progressively on behalf of our emerging fine wine industry by opening up our state to direct shipment of wines from every producing state. This will allow Wyncroft and other Michigan wineries an amazing business opportunity to grow, provide more jobs, plant more vineyards, preserve valuable farm land, and bring tourist and tax dollars to our state. It will also make it possible for Michigan residents and voters to have access to the rare and expensive wines from such states as California which they now do not have. Ultimately this is a consumer issue. By ruling in favor of open shipping, you will be fostering the conditions necessary for small wineries like Wyncroft to get off the ground financially, to have access to the entire United States as a market, and to give Michigan consumers the maximum benefits of increased options and lower prices.

Sincerely,

James, Rae Lee, Eric, and Hilary Lester
Wyncroft, LLC

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "James J. Lester". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name and company information.

FROM THE CELLAR

MONDAY MAY 12 200

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I saw wine's future, and its name is Shou

Back in the 1970s, Jon Landau, a hugely influential writer for Rolling Stone magazine, went to a concert in Asbury Park, N.J. He was so smitten by the band he saw that he returned and wrote, "I saw rock and roll's future, and its name is Bruce Springsteen."

Landau quit, became Springsteen's producer for the "Born to Run" album and managed him for years after that. His declaration is now part of rock and roll history.

Stealing from that sentiment completely shamelessly, I have seen the future of wine in America, and its name is 1999 Wyncroft Shou.

Simply put, Shou is stunning. In several ways, it is another breakthrough wine for an industry that has been growing by leaps and bounds. The word "Shou" means longevity, and its symbol adorns the Wyncroft label.

The wine itself is a traditional Bordeaux blend made of grapes grown in Michigan. Our state has had a decade of producing some of the best nestlings in North America. We have had a spotty history with pinot

noir — some years it ripens; some it doesn't. It's often too lean, green and almost stemmy.

Chardonnay has been quite successful. And, Bordeaux varietals, which go into Wyncroft — cabernet sauvignon, merlot and



Christopher Cook

cabernet franc — have been grown in Michigan with varying degrees of success, depending on where they are planted.

But until Wyncroft Shou — made from the Wyncroft winery in Buchanan, with vineyards in the surrounding area — we have not really had a Bordeaux that was such an unquestioned success. That's because Shou achieved the fullness that comes with the ripeness of Napa, the character of Stag's Leap, the structure of Bordeaux and the seamless elegance of the great wine-making of Pauillac and Margaux.

And, to round everything out, at \$40 a bottle, the price tag is even similar.

It has cedar and coffee aromas on the nose; on the entry, cherry, herbs, coffee and vanilla. It is huge in the midmouth, deeply layered and complex with good acidity balance and finesse.

The Shou is a blend of 76 percent cabernet sauvignon, 19 percent cabernet franc and 5 percent merlot from the stony soils of Wyncroft's Avonlea Vineyard.

Wyncroft is owned by Jim and Rae Lee Lester. They have been in the winemak-

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\$40-per-bottle Wyncroft Shou measures up to \$100 California wines

ing business for about 15 years, but only recently obtained their federal and state licenses for this winery.

Jim used to be a partner in the defunct Madron Lakes Hill winery.

So, why would Shou be so successful? Because, Lester says, "My vineyard site gets an average of 3,000 heat units per year. Bordeaux and Burgundy receive 2,600 and 2,400, respectively. Chateau d'Au-Pape gets 2,700. ... I hang the grapes until late October. Bordeaux harvests in late September."

What's more, Lester adds, "The stony soil reflects lots of heat and produces tiny berries with very thick skins." And he gets very good sugar content, essential to eventually making alcohol in the wine. Alcohols usually range around 12.5 percent to 13 percent. The 1999 Shou is 14.8 percent.

So the bottom line is, my predictions were correct, that southwest Michigan has the soil and climate to produce world-class Bordeaux-style wines, Lester said.

Last week, I took two bottles of Shou to California for a wine gathering of some of the best palates in North America. The wine elicited shock and superlatives.

Among those amazed by the quality of Wyncroft Shou and

the revelation that it was grown and made in Michigan were winemakers Carol Shelton (formerly Windsor and now Carol Shelton Wines); Jeff McBride (Carm Creek Winery); Mitch Cosentino (Cosentino Winery); Marco Capelli (Swenson Winery); David Vergari (Maddalena Winery); and John McPherson (Thornton), not to mention Doug Frost (writer, Sante magazine) and Wilfred Wong (wine buyer, Beverages & More).

"This wine is extraordinary."

Dan Berger
wine columnist

"This wine is extraordinary," said columnist Dan Berger, whose work appears in the San Francisco Examiner and

Wine Enthusiast. "Last week, I blind-tasted two dozen California wines priced around \$100, and this Wyncroft easily rates with the two best in that group."

The Lesters also make an Avonlea chardonnay (\$40) and two single-vineyard nestlings, one from the old Madron Lakes Hill vines he helped plant and used to tend.

If you want to try Wyncroft, it's sold mostly in restaurants and barely at all in retail stores. But Michigan law does allow you to buy it and have it shipped direct from the winery. The Lesters also make delivery trips periodically across the state. Write to the winery at 716-B E. Front St., Buchanan 49107; or e-mail Lester at jglester@juno.com.

(Christopher Cook is a freelance writer. His column appears Mondays. Contact him at (734) 327-1910 or by e-mail at cook@metrocominternational.com.)